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SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 1871.

Subject: God's Disinterestedness.

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PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

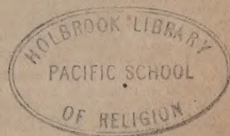
A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



New-York:

J. B. FORD & CO., No. 39 PARK ROW.

1871.

AMERICAN NEWS COMPANY, AGENTS FOR THE TRADE.

European Agents, SAMPSON LOW, SON, & MARSTON, Crown Buildings, 138 Fleet Street, London.

AUTHORIZATION.

Brooklyn, January, 1869.

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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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POSTAGE OF PLYMOUTH PULPIT to subscribers in the United States is twenty cents per year, payable quarterly, in advance, at the Post-Office to which the pamphlet is sent; and on single copies to England it is four cents.

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GOD'S DISINTERESTEDNESS.

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."—MATT. iv., 48.

I suspect that almost every one reads this merely as a command that we should become perfect persons. And very many suppose it to be a command that we shall be as perfect as God is—that the measure of perfection in us shall be as complete as is the measure of perfection in God.

In the first place, the command, *Be ye therefore perfect*, is not to be considered in a rigidly imperative sense. It is not, in other words, to be supposed that perfection can be attained by men with the mode of organization employed in their creation, in their relations to this world, in their relations to social life, and in their relations to God and the future. It is not to be supposed that the perfect outline which is to be filled up before we can be perfect is the creature of volition. It is not to be supposed that a man can be perfect simply by willing to be perfect; or, that perfection is a state wrought in men by a supernal power, with instantaneousness, with miraculousness, if I may so call it. It is not the supposition that men, being called from darkness to light, can, either by the force of their own will, or by the overwhelming power of the Divine Spirit, rise suddenly into conditions of spiritual perfection. For everywhere throughout the Bible there is the recognition of that which we find always to be the fact, that even under the best conditions men reach toward perfection by growth.

"Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

But growth is in its nature gradual. It is a process of gradual evolution. And it is said, even of Christ himself, that *he was made perfect, though a Son, by the things which he suffered*.

He developed in his mortal state by assuming conditions of mortality. He became subject to this law of gradual development; and he *grew* in knowledge and stature, and in favor with God and man, and in the elements of wisdom and goodness. And that which was true of the Saviour, was true of the apostles. And that which was

true of the apostles, has been true of good men in every age since that time. They have come gradually, and through a process of education, into the higher conditions of a spiritual life. So it is not to be supposed that we are commanded, by a jump, to come to that which experience teaches us we can come to only by growth—by gradual succession.

We might, therefore, give to this *Be ye*, the force of *Strive to be*. This is a general command implying that an action is already set on foot. It implies that this is a thing to be done in your seeking to be perfect. The spirit of the passage is, Be perfect *as*, or *according to the manner in which*, God himself chooses to be perfect. Do not fall on the wrong model. Do not have a false conception of the direction in which you are to seek your true manhood. It is not this: Be *as* perfect as God is. That is a wrong interpretation of it. It is not this: Be just as full and just as complete in perfection as God is. It is this: Take the divine notion of what perfection is, and attempt to be perfect according to that notion, and not according to the mere question of fullness, largeness, symmetry, and so on. Look at the context, and you will see that this is the true construction which I have given.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans [the worst sort of men] the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

That is the way in which he is perfect. Disinterestedness is the perfection which is meant. He makes his sun to rise upon the just and upon the unjust. He loves the unlovely. He does good to the undeserving. And when you undertake to be perfect, remember the *way* in which God himself is perfect, and be perfect according to that manner. It is an exhortation to disinterested benevolence as a supreme ideal, both of divine perfection, and of individual perfection.

A little more lengthy consideration of this will, perhaps, give us a power of inference which we could not otherwise get.

You have heard that it has been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, because there is good reason for it. Either he is lovable, or he loves you; or he has performed kindly offices toward you. There you have a motive. You have been taught to hate your enemy because he is ugly; because he is unjust; because he stirs you up wickedly and wrongfully. And there is a motive and a reason. But Christ says, "I declare that you are to love your enemies."

How can a man love his enemy? He is wrong; and can a man love that which is wrong? He is directing that wrong so that it becomes keenly appreciated by me because it is measured by my own sensitive selfness, if not selfishness; and are we commanded to love a man so? He maligns me. He follows me. He curtails my comfort. He destroys my usefulness. He embitters my life. He vexes my friends. He weakens my standing. He throws around about me a malignant glamour. And what motive, what inspiration is there that shall enable me to love any man who is, in his declared conduct, and in his whole attitude, hostile to me? How can a man love hatefulness?—especially hatefulness active, and addressing itself directly to me? It cannot be done.

Yet Christ says, “Love not those that are lovely alone: love the unlovely; and love them in their most active form. Unlovely people that are brought right home to you in personal contact and conflict—love them. Bless them that curse you. Do good to them that hate you. Those that have in them that hate which is of the fire of hell, and which shall consume and burn and destroy—do good to them. And do it that you may become like God; that is, that you may become the children of your Father, which is in heaven.”

And in order that he may not be misunderstood, he says, “This is what God is doing. He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good [in his career over the world, the sun sees many more men that do not deserve his blessing than those that do, and still he shines on with a bounty of light, and has done so through ages]; and he sendeth his rain, not according to men’s deserts, but on the just and on the unjust alike.”

Men are accustomed, when they state their distinctions, keeping up their ideas of moral government, to say that God does send his natural bounties on men without any regard to character; but that he cannot be understood to send his personal favors and his spiritual favors upon men without any regard to character. But that is not the question at all. The Saviour is endeavoring to teach this point: “When you attempt to form an ideal of manhood and true character, you must take God’s character as a pattern. You are to love that which is hateful and that which is oppugnant to you. You are to bless those that curse you, and forgive those that hate you. Ideally, you must raise up in your mind a picture of what God’s character is, and you must attempt to be perfect according to that character.”

This is not a delineation of the divine moral government, but a declaration of what the constituent elements of the divine character are. And that declaration is that those elements are disinterested goodness, divine benevolence, and kindness to the undeserving. That

is the type of God's character—if there can be such a thing as a type spoken of where there is but one.

Here, then, we have, by the hand of Christ himself, an authoritative, and explicit, and incontrovertible declaration, that this is an attribute of the divine nature, and that it is the very point in the divine nature which we are to recognize as the model for our imitation. God's nature, in other words, is such that he does good, not because men are good, and not because they deserve that which is good, but simply because *He* is good. And it is this that I want to dwell upon at some length.

God does not love men because they are amiable. He does not confer gifts upon men because they deserve them, or have earned them. He confers them because the fullness of his own nature needs expression. It is the outward pressure in himself of vast love and beneficence that wants expression. And he sends that love and beneficence abroad. He does good to people in heaven and on earth, and will, to all eternity, because there is such a fullness of this need in himself, working out in the happiness and benefaction of his creatures.

Can we understand this? Yes. We see it in life. The highest form of any faculty is that in which the force of the feelings gives it an automatic development. That is a low condition of faculty which requires to be solicited and brought out by something that is presented to it. And in men, where any part of their nature is highly organized; where they have, as we say, *eminent gifts*; where they have first-class endowments, the token of it is that the faculty, or power, or whatever you choose to call it, is in such a condition that it does not need any outward solicitation to develop it—that it develops itself from the nature that is in it.

Thus, for example, there is in some natures such a large organized tendency to music that they develop music, not because some one asks them to, not because if they do it may give them fame or reputation; but because it is there, and demands expression. It does not need outward solicitation. They *think* music; they *sing*. Why? Because it is in them to do it. Because they want to, in themselves. There is many a person who, if you were to put him on an island in the ocean, where there was no soul but himself, would be thinking choruses and symphonies. He could not help it. This is something that works out from the inside. It is inspiration. It is automatic. It is self-moving.

So it is with poetry. There are many men who write poetry, just as farmers raise corn, and send it to market. Some think that they will make money by it; some think that they will make fame by it; and

they sweat, and tug, and make poetry by the hardest. There are others through whose whole lives there is a tinge of poetic color in almost every thought; and at times there will be hours of rapture. They cannot help it. They see visions, and they dream dreams; and their thoughts flow musically, and almost in numbers. We call them inspired. We say that they are men of genius.

What do you mean by *men of genius*? I mean this: that where a man has any faculty that is carried above the middle line, so that it is self-moved, he has genius. Genius, and genius only, enables a man to be creative. If any man has faculties that are automatic in their action, and that develop themselves, not by outward solicitation, but according to some inward invitation or want, he has in him the elements of an inventor. Many persons invent because they are asked to, or because they are stirred up to. Others invent because invention is in them. It is their nature to be fruitful in that way.

Now, many men are benevolent because they are provoked to benevolence; and many others are benevolent because they are so full of kindness and love that these qualities flow from them steadily, as silver streams flow out of the sides of mountains.

So on persons that are called good-natured, good dinners have a pleasing influence. Good luck has a very cheering influence on them. Some rare stroke of fortune comes to them, and they are eminently good-natured. And you can tell the reason why. But there are good-natured men about whom you never think of asking the reason why. They are always so. They cannot be any different. The current runs spontaneously in that direction in them. They cannot help it.

Some men are benevolent at intervals. Some are benevolent when the proper time comes round, and they are never benevolent at any other times. But there are persons who are bathed in an atmosphere of benevolence, and are never out of it. Benevolence is in them by original organization and tendency.

This is what we call *inspiration*, or *genius*. It is a certain fullness of nature that leads action to be from within outward, and, from the reason of inwardness, so full and sensitive that it shows itself in outward action. It is the highest conception among men. There is no faculty that men love to praise more than genius. It stands superior to all other conditions of the faculties. And it points to this conception of the divine nature. It points to the same thing in God—a Being whose attributes are so full and so sensitive that they do not need the solicitation of outward circumstances. The divine Heart pours forth its bounty from reasons that are in itself—from its infinite fullness, its infinite necessity, and not from

its self-love, as we do in a lower sphere, and according to the laws of that lower sphere.

The imperfect moral conditions in us know something of what it is to have spontaneity and overflow of life and inspiration; and carrying that ideal up, and enlarging it to the full measure of all the attributes of God, we perceive that he sits in the heaven, eternally willing, thinking, governing, by the outflow of a nature righteous pure, holy, just and good, and moved, not by argument, nor by persuasion, nor by inspection, but by an infinite necessity in himself to pour out the goodness and the fullness that is in him.

Look at the thought of the Apocalypse, where the throne is described, and where it is said that out from under it proceeds the river of life, and that on either side of it are trees whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. It is as if it had been said, "The life of God (for *Throne* means God) who sits there, flows like a river."

A river, according to our way of looking at it, is that which has in itself its own motion, as it were. Its power is not derived from the will of man. It is not the miller that coaxes the river to flow by his mill: it is the river that coaxes the miller to set himself down on its bank with his mill. It is its nature which gives it automatic power. It has its rise in the mountains, and streams flow down to form it, and it has a power of its own by which it flows on and pours out its waters into the ocean or the lake. In summer and in winter, through all time, it pursues its course from a force which is inherent in itself. And so through ages the old Amazon has poured its mighty flood into the Atlantic; and the Mississippi has emptied its vast volumes into the Gulf; and the St. Lawrence has flowed into the upper ocean, melting myriads of tons of ice. And they are forever flowing. And God sits with an inexhaustible stream of benevolence flowing out from under his throne. All that vast treasure of sympathy and love; all things which go to constitute the highest Fatherhood, are represented as coming forth from under the throne of God. And all those things that grow on the banks of the river of life, and whose leaves are said to be for the healing of the nations, are represented as issuing from beneath the throne.

Or, take the favorite image of our God as a *Sun*. It is said of Christ, "He is the light of the world." Consider that the sun is not an orb that shines because it is solicited. Consider that fire is not struck out of him as men strike fire out of a flint. We do not get flame from the sun as men get flame by rubbing a match. The sun is a globe of heat and fire that, in an incessant stream, pours out and radiates from itself these boundless stores of light and heat.

And God forever radiates, sends from himself, from the necessity of His nature, these boundless stores of beneficence.

This is the Being that presides central throughout the whole universe. He is not One that is to be conceived of according to the penurious, beggarly notion of an earthly monarch. He is not one who needs to be approached, to be worshiped, to be solicited, in order to be kept good-natured. He is not one that gives upon a consideration of the desert of the recipient. The true idea is, that God is a Being who sits in the center of the universe, with a nature so full of all bounty that it has an endless flow, and is like a river that, through summer and winter, and through ages unnumbered, moves steadily on. He is the Regent, the Center of all things; and from him all things proceed.

When, therefore, we are commanded to be like God, it is not meant that we should be as large as he is, nor as wise as he is. It is not even meant that we shall be symmetrical as he is. It is not meant that we shall be perfect as God is in any artistic sense. This is what is meant. If you would imitate God aright, remember that he loves unlovely beings; remember that he forgives hateful folks, who do not deserve forgiveness; remember that it is not the bountiful alone to whom God gives; remember that the stingy old miser receives the rain and the sunlight as much as the philanthropist.

I think everybody feels, at once, "Why, these do not deserve it!" No; but God's nature is such that he outpours his own feelings, so that the good and the bad get his bounty; so that the just and the unjust get it. And you cannot get away from it. There it is declared by our Lord Jesus Christ that the pattern which you are to imitate is God's nature in this thing, that he makes his sun to rise on the good and on the bad, and that he sends his rain on the just and on the unjust alike.

The doctrine to which I beg to call your attention, is that the truest and noblest conception of moral quality is one that has the reason of its being and action in itself, and not in that which is outside of it. It is disinterested, in other words.

I shall not now risk the strength of this subject by undertaking to square it by the proper pattern of the schools. I shall not qualify these statements by saying that God has a personal partiality which proceeds on a divine pattern. In other words, I shall not attempt to show that God, in forming friendships, in selecting his personal companions from among men, if I may so say, does it on the divine principle of moral loveliness. I suggest that there is a subject in this direction, but that ought to be treated by itself; and you might better have this other side exaggerated, than not to have it in your

mind at all, or to have it there in a form that is comparatively weak

I remark, then, in view of this explanation.

1. This is the distinctive peculiarity of God's nature which was thought of by our Saviour, which he emphasized, and which he held up for us to imitate—goodness from his own love of goodness. We cheat ourselves because our ideal of God is erroneous. We fall into endless mistakes in regard to human conduct because we fail to perceive this peculiar feature of God's character—that he does kindnesses, that he acts kindly, because he himself hungers to be kind. It is the efflux and proper expression of his own nature. And this kindness, this goodness, is to be in us.

Compare this with the notions which are prevalent. What is goodness? An ascetic will tell you that the proper idea of the Christian state is to deny yourself in every possible way; to mortify the flesh, and the passions and appetites of it; to circumscribe your enjoyment; not to be seduced by any evils; to live in a state of perpetual cross-bearing and self-denial, with tears and groans and anguish, that you may at last be found fit to enter into the kingdom of God. It is *false!* It is a *lie!* and the worst kind of a lie, because it is against the genius of the universe; because it is in opposition to the very marrow of the Gospel—if men are, in God's providence, ordained to work out the problem. Our sins and troubles are to bring tears and sorrows, to be sure; but it is not the distinctive characteristic of Christianity, that a man is to have an ascetic love for pain and sorrow, as though they were good in themselves. "Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," who lives and administers by a disinterested kindness, which is the pattern that men are to follow.

There are many who think that being pious signifies a cold scrupulosity—an exact circumspection. And this idea is united to another idea, of self-culture. That men shall keep themselves unspotted from the world; that they shall be radiant all the time, growing brighter and brighter; and that they shall build themselves up in a certain symmetrical and stately strength and excellence—that they think is piety. It may be one of the things which will make piety stronger; it may give a man a greater power in using himself, as undoubtedly it does; but that which makes a man Christlike is not the fact that he is doing so much for himself, that he is building himself up in various right things, and ridding himself of various wrong things: it is that he is perfect, *as* his Father in heaven is, who makes His sun to shine on the good and on the bad, and who sends His rain on the just and on the unjust. Disinterested love, disinterested goodness—that is the pattern.

There are others whose idea of piety is largely shaped by the esthetic feeling. Nothing seems to them to be good that is not symmetrical. Nothing seems to be good to them that is not harmonious. Taste, rather than benevolence is their divinity ; and every fault disgusts them. They are apt to be full of class-selfishness. They are apt to separate themselves from men. They are apt to have the Pharisaism of the pew, and to be satisfied only with walking in the midst of things that are well-ordered and beautiful. I love beauty and regularity, too, where they are under the guidance and inspiration of a disinterested benevolence ; but where they are substitutes for it, I abhor them. I would as soon undertake to raise my harvest by the pale moonbeams instead of the glory and fervor of the sun, as to undertake to raise anything like character, or give it anything like power in the world, by the esthetic principle. As an adjuvant, as a collateral, wielded by the hand of power, it is good ; but of itself it is not piety—though many make it to be. Benevolence is the center of true Christian character. Christian character is an automatic state of benevolence. It is a state of benevolence so full that it overflows, not upon consideration and measure, but as a lamp sheds its light abroad.

Do you suppose a candle, standing in the window, says, "I will look down the road, and if I see a miserable, lone fellow traveling, I will not shine upon him"? No, it says, "I will treat all alike." The first that comes over the hill is father Good-heart ; and the candle shines along the road and lights him on his way. And how little that candle wastes its light ! It is a guide to this wayfaring man. And it does not say, "It is for me to be just," but shines without regard to any such question as that. Next comes a hard, stingy man, who is traveling ten miles at a shilling's expense to collect a sixpence from some poor widow. And the candle says, "Yes, that is the road. That is the way. Travel on." Next comes a poor orphan boy, crying because he is afraid that he shall be belated at night ; and the candle shines for him, to cheer him on his way. Next comes a robust shepherd boy, whistling with joy ; and the candle shines for him. And everybody who walks that road gets the guidance of that candle without discrimination. They are all human beings needing guidance. Not one of them deserves it ; the best of them have forfeited their right to it ; but the candle shines for them all. And so the sun sends its light abroad over the world.

This is to be the supreme ideal of a true manhood in Christ Jesus. A man that is intellectually perfect, and therefore doctrinally correct, and stands forever turning the wheel of some ecclesiastical machine, grinding out dogmas and propositions and prin-

ciples and truths for mankind, is not ministering to the spiritual wants of the race. Men do not feed on such shadows as these. He has Christ who is perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect. Benevolence is the genius of perfection.

Oh ! how far are the surly-browed and wrinkled-foreheaded men that with fierce zeal and intense determination push the right although it goes like a sword, from being God-men, after the pattern of Christ Jesus !

2. There is a relation that this idea sustains to the popular notions of justice which require a consideration. There are many who are confounded on this subject. They have a notion about justice that I think will never be found outside of the bounds of this world, as it is mechanical and physical. As justice has been administered—and it has been administered in very imperfect ways—it has generally followed a simple line of action proceeding upon intellectual perceptions, in setting apart men, right and left, as good and bad. Justice to the good requires that they have prosperity ; and justice to the bad requires that they be unprosperous. This has been the line of demarcation. This treating men according to their deserts has been the supreme idea of justice. It has acted upon the plan of giving to good men what they deserve, and of giving to bad men what they deserve.

Now, I aver that there is no possibility of justice according to this idea. You do not know what a good man deserves, if he deserves anything. You cannot measure it. You do not know what a bad man deserves. You cannot measure it. You would not have me treat that man other than strictly according to his deserts ? But can you tell whether there is in that man's state anything that he has inherited ? Can you tell what ancestral strains have come down into that man's nature ? Can you tell what infelicities there have been in that man's education, which gave him warp and bias ? Can you tell me what experience has struck into his being and stained him through and through ? Can you tell what are the trials of that man's heart ? Can you tell how hard it is for him to overcome the passions and appetites and circumstances that tempt him to be bad ? Can you tell what is the secret spring of his action ? How little do you know of his motive, and of the operation of that motive ! And yet, you talk of giving to that man according to his deserts. You have not the first element of judgment in his case. You know nothing about it.

You remember how Christ Jesus, in contrasting the Pharisees who seemed to be first-rate people, were men well-to-do in the world, and were overgrown from excessive indulgence in the luxu-

ries of life, but who were exemplary, and about as deserving as anybody in the community—you remember how Christ in contrasting them with persons in the street, that were steeped in vice and crime, and that seemed ready to dissolve like ichor into the abyss of hell, and deserved nothing but reproach and condemnation, apparently, said,

“The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.”

How little can we administer justice in one case or another! How far are the thoughts of God from our thoughts!

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

On the other hand, if justice be kindness suitably administered, then there can be very little doubt as to the reality of justice, and very little doubt as to its benefit. What is justice but the administration of kindness in the way that shall suit each man's necessity, and his necessity in his social liabilities and relationships? That which is drawing every man with love, and which is drawing him with that which love inspires, and which every man needs in himself and in the relations which he sustains to his fellow-men—that is justice. The administration of benevolence is justice. It is the tendency to do good to a man, first from a consideration of what he is, and second from a consideration of the relationship in which he stands.

Although, oftentimes, justice may take on a pain-giving form, it is not on that account a malign feeling. It is necessary, not unfrequently to give pain to one that you love.

I remember very well, when I used to come in from my sports, soiled and smouched (for I did not spare myself), and was to be brought into decent society, and it was necessary for the sisterly hand to rub the dirt from my face, I never liked it. And I know that when my hair, that went with the winds, and played with every one of them, had to be smoothed out, I never liked the passage of the comb through it—although they were seeking beauty. (I hope they found it!) It was done with the utmost kindness. It was done from the best feeling, by the nurse, or the sister, or the mother; but to me it was vexation and torment—in a small way. I never liked it. When I had committed any offense against brother or sister, and it became necessary for me to have my moral sense awakened in order that I might see that I had violated the law of kindness, and feel those mysterious tinglings, which were eye-openers, that I might see the way of love which I had missed, and come back into it, these things were not pleasant to me.

“No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.”

And all the way through the household there is this infliction of

pain. There is nothing in this world that inflicts so much pain, and saves so much, as love. It is the judicious administration of restraint, it is the judicious administration of pungency, it is the judicious administration of enforced duty and instruction, that educates the child.

The great-bosomed mother, the great radiant face of a love watching that pain shall not go a bit too far, but still pressing it, and still insisting upon it, says, "My dear child, I will not suffer you to grow up so. I cannot live and see you become bad. My darling, you *shall not* be bad. By all the love that is in me, and by all the hope that is in me, and by all the prophecy of a mother's heart, you shall not be bad. I will cry with you, but cry you shall! It is necessary to make you sweeter and better and nobler." Is not that justice?

There is another way of estimating justice. "Who is this? Fetch him up. He has been here half a dozen times before. Drunk again, eh? Here, officer, give him four months. Public purity must be preserved. It is time for us to go to dinner. Send the others up three months apiece. Never mind, I will hear those cases after dinner." That is justice, is it? Men say, "We must keep up the dignity of the law; we must see that authority is not trodden under foot; we must maintain morality in the community." I say that it is hideous injustice. I say that selfishness and indifference to human character and suffering are infernal. And nothing can change the nature of things. He that does not care in his heart, though he does the right thing, is unjust. Where a judge commits a criminal; where he strikes the law down upon the wrongdoer, and says, "He ought to have it, and I am glad that he has got it," it is infernal. It is not justice, even though the man may merit stripes, and though it may be best that he should have them. There is not, in God's universe, any man that has a right to put his hand upon another man except it be the hand of love. He that has no love has no right to touch anybody.

God, himself, in the infinite expansive government of the universe, sits regent, as the God of love, saying, "Be perfect as I am. And I tell all mankind what I am by making my sun to rise upon the good and the bad, and by sending my rain upon the just and upon the unjust. Be ye perfect in that way."

If this be the true notion of justice—the notion of love educating men, of love using whatever is needful for men's education, of love seeking to administer for men for their good, in all their relations; that is, with a wise regard to all their necessities which spring out of their social connections in society—if this be the true notion of justice, ought it not to revolutionize the literature, and amend the thought and procedure of almost all mankind?

Now, justice is vengeful. Now, justice springs from blood. Now, justice helps that which is animal in man. Now, justice is the unpurged, uncleansed, unripened, blind impulse of the beast that is yet in mankind. But justice in God is the efflux and the power and the wisdom and the goodness of love, shaping men out of poverty, and out of imperfection, and out of sin; molding them; and bringing them out into the bright and glorious image of the God of love. And every man under the divine administration has a right to that justice. He has a right to as much kindness and to as much goodness as he can profit by consistently with all the relations which he sustains to the mass of society.

The application of this thought, which is made by our Saviour himself, is one that ought to be made by us a thousand times where we make it once—its application, I mean, to the forgiveness of men. What is the ground of forgiveness? It does not lie in the recipient at all. It lies in the giver. We forgive simply because it is the nature of goodness to do it. Kindness, love—this does not take any offense. It has nothing to avenge. It is a spontaneous outflow of generous feeling. Love seeks to remedy evils. When it sees a fault or a mistake or a sin, it seeks to efface it. God forgives men. Why? Because he loves to do it. He does it *for his own sake*. Misinterpreting that expression, old theologians supposed that God forgave men for his own sake just as a king put a crown on his head for his own sake. They gave it a monarchical significance. But I believe that God forgives for his own sake in a psychological sense. A generous man gives away handful after handful of money, why? Because the act bounds back with pleasure to him inwardly. Forgiveness is the instinctive action of a true generosity in a man. Why do some men speak with figures of beauty? Because it is their duty to do it? No; but because they cannot help themselves. They see visions in the air, and they paint pictures unconsciously. In their nature they do it because their nature tends to act in that way. Why does God forgive? Because it is his nature to forgive. And he forgives perpetually. He loves to forgive.

Well, do you mean to tell me that all stand on an equal footing? No, but the condition does not lie in desert. Nobody is benefited by being forgiven unless he takes the bounty. The mere act of kind feeling does not do anybody any good.

After many wanderings I come back to the place of my birth. I have lost all trace of my friends. My father and mother were living when I left home and became a sailor boy; but I have lost communication with them. They have moved out of the city. As near as I can learn, they are in such a near country town. And, foot-bare, I

set out and go there. It is twilight when I reach the town. And weary and worn I sit down on the steps of a little dwelling. I cannot help shedding tears, I am so miserable. I say to my elf, "I have come back home, and I cannot find that anybody who knows me lives; and I have no place to go. I have no father and no mother." And I lean my head upon my hand, and against the door, and cannot sleep for my thoughts. Quite unknown to me or them I have sat down right where my father and mother live. They are sitting by the hearth. The mother, knitting, and looking into the fire, sees strange ships, and on every one of them is her sailor boy. And she says, "Oh, that he would come home!" And the father, drawing out his handkerchief, wipes tears from his eyes. They look at each other; and each knows what the other is thinking of; but they do not speak. The thoughts and affections of those old people center about me. They would give all they have in the world if they knew my whereabouts. And there I sit on their doorstep. They fain would minister to my wants; but the bounty of love which they would bestow upon me is inside, and does not get outside, I do not press in to get it, and so I do not have it.

Now, suppose a man, going on in a sinful course, wants to be forgiven? God offers forgiveness to him; but it may be that it does not reach him. God does not force forgiveness upon men. It requires, in order to be effectual, to be accepted. Unless it be a fact, a reality, to a man, it can do him no good. And so, though God pours abroad heart-love for all men, all men do not enjoy its blessings. The sunlight does not guide blind folks; and love does not smile upon men, though it be never so bountiful, if they do not open their eyes to behold it; but the moment they do open their eyes, and see it, they feel its inspiring power. And for a man to pray for forgiveness whose heart is in a condition to receive forgiveness, is like a man's praying for rain in an equinoctial storm. The whole heaven is full of it, and the whole earth and atmosphere are saturated with it. Take it. It never will be anything to you till you do take it. Melt it into your consciousness. Coin it into your own experience. Then it will bring forth rich and blessed results. The trouble is that you do not take forgiveness. Forgiveness is not prepared for you and for the occasion: it pours forth its bounty ceaselessly and endlessly. And shall father, shall mother, shall lover never forget to love, and their love never forget to be gracious, and shall God, who is so much greater, and so much grander, and so much better, sit with unextinguished hate and revenge? Shall he not love on and forever, who symbolizes himself by the ever-shining sun, which pours its bounty on the good and the bad, and who sends his rain on the just and the unjust alike?

You will be very apt to like this side of the subject—the forgiveness of God to you; but now, on the other side, do you forgive in that way? I have noticed one thing—that men are always willing to forgive after an offense has been acknowledged, and the effect of it has been done away, and they have been suitably worshiped, and patted, and “set up.” When they have subdued the person, and got an advantage over him, then they are willing to forgive him. That is a domineering and most hateful despotism, instead of forgiveness. It is as far removed as possible from divine forgiveness. Love forgives without conditions. Love forgives once for all. Love forgives without regard to any after consideration. Love covers down the offense which it has forgiven.

God’s love does to the sinner what a mother’s love does to a fractious child. The child disobeys her, and gives her pain, for days, and weeks, and months, and years; and yet she forgives it. Do you forgive men thus?

You say men who have committed an offense against you do not deserve forgiveness. But the question of forgiveness is not one of desert. The question of forgiveness is a question of your resemblance to God. It is a question of your being filled with this divine beneficence. It is a question of your having regard for the well-being of others, and yearning to do them good, and being willing, not only to give them amnesty, but, as it were, to give them your own self.

“Do you mean to say, then, that the moment a man has done you a wrong you are to fly to his neck?” Oh, no, not necessarily. It may be that the manifestation of this feeling would be the worst thing for the person. It may be that the spirit of love will inspire you to take a course of discipline. But that which actuates you must not be the hardness of conscience. It certainly must not be combativeness, with the monkey-cap of conscience on it. It must not be hatred. It must not be revenge. It must not be selfishness making believe that it is conscience. Nobody has a right to chastise till he is in a forgiving frame of mind; till he is conscious that his heart is full and surcharged with that same love which made Christ die for sinners while yet they were his enemies.

“Oh, but,” say men (how scriptural men become when it is the malign passions that want to justify themselves!) “how is it in Luke xviith, 4th?” Let us see how it is.

“And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.”

People say, “As soon as I see evidence of repentance, I am willing to forgive.” But is repentance here declared to be a condition of forgiveness? Not at all. There is no idea conveyed, that you shall

not forgive a man until he repents. The Saviour is supposing the case of a man who comes to you to be forgiven of an offense. The man says, "I have offended against you, and I beg to be forgiven." Your clerk comes to you and says, "I promise never to drink again; but last night I was overcome by wine. I am sorry for it. Will you bear with me?" "Yes," you say, "I will bear with you." And you do not say it because the man says that he is sorry, though the man does say so. In the course of a month or two he is overcome again, and he comes back and implores your forgiveness, saying, "I have the same sad story to tell, and I am ashamed to tell it. I am heartily sorry for it. Last night I was carried away by my associates, and led to drink again. Are you willing to bear with me?" You are willing; and your big-heartedness is such that you forgive him, not simply because he said, "I am sorry," not because of any good thing that is in him; but out of regard to his welfare. Repentance was never made by our Master a condition of forgiveness. On the other hand, in Matthew xviiith, 21st, it is, without any qualification, taught that men ought to be forgiven as often as they offend.

"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?"

Here no condition is stated.

"Jesus said unto him I say not unto you, Until seven times; but, until seventy times seven."

Now that is language to which it is utterly impossible to apply any condition. It is definite language. It means: Forever forgive. Live in a state of mind in which forgiveness will come spontaneously. Never will a man come to you in such a state that you ought not to be in a forgiving mood toward him.

But there is this to be said: that in a spirit of true love a course of discipline pursued with the person forgiven is oftentimes good for that person. You must impose some limitation that shall be wholesome. You may say to your child, "I shall not show you kindness till you have gone and asked forgiveness of your brother whom you spit upon. I love you dearly. I love you too well to let you go unpunished. I cannot take such a naughty child into my lap. You shall not sit with me, and you shall not sit at the table, and you shall not go with your young companions, until you have brought yourself into a right state of mind. I am in a right state of mind, and you must be, too."

A man stands by a piano, with one hand on the key and the other on the chord, and as he tightens the chord it cries, "Don't, don't, don't, don't," until, at last, it is tuned; and no harm is done to the instrument, either.

So God does to us; and so we do to others. It is a musical ear

seeking harmony—not a hard hand seeking regularity. So we deal with our children. We do not shield them from the effects of their wrong-doing. But there must be discrimination in this regard. There must not be a systematic laying down of conditions. You say, “A man that has done wrong must take steps to renounce that wrong. Let him show me that he is sorry, and then I will turn around and take steps to forgive him.” Not a bit of it. That is not the idea at all. You are to be Father Greatheart. You are to be the soul of bounty. You are to love that man so much that you can be patient with him. Yea, more, you are to love him so that you can make him suffer for the sake of making him better. But it must be unmistakable love, full of sweetness and graciousness and gentleness, so that the sufferer himself shall say, “It is love dealing with me for my good.” There is to be no acerbity in forgiveness; there is to be no sternness in it; there is to be no cruelty in it. There is to be in forgiveness nothing but the deepest love, plenary, ample, infinite, as it is administered in the hands of God forever and forever. And all subterfuges of hatred and wounded pride must be exposed.

There are thousands of persons lurking in the devil’s den who would have you believe that they are spotless as lambs. They are not. They are wolves’cubs. They snap with their teeth, and rend with their claws. And yet, they claim to be acting under the influence of the spirit of forgiveness. They “stand on right and truth, and do not forgive until men are prepared by repentance to be forgiven.”

4. In organizing the household, and in organizing society, is it not time that we should attempt to carry out to their full force the instruments of love and benevolence, in governing and developing men, and in promoting the well-being of society. We have tried other things, one after another. We have had eras, we have had epochs, of various kinds. And so far as love has been tried, it has been found to be the most universal educator and cultivator of peace.

There is one place where love is more nearly supreme than anywhere else; and that is where success has been achieved more nearly than anywhere else. I refer to the household. There the fountain of love is never sealed. There love is more nearly on the pattern of love in heaven than anywhere else. That is the bright spot of human history. While nations have gone on, voluminous, vast, dark, with desolation on every hand, groaning and travailing in pain until now; while there have been outward conflicts innumerable; while the world has been full of confusion and crying and misery, there have been in all lands houses with families secluded in them. And that which the State lacked, and business lacked, and

all men outside of the household lacked, the household has possessed. Equity, justice, forgiveness, has flourished in the household.

And is it not high time to break away from the popular notion in regard to justice and forgiveness, and substitute the divine idea for it?

At present I should not abolish the ruder forms of government, and attempt to govern simply on the principle of benevolence, because men are not disciplined to it. The government which we have is better than nothing. The rude forces of law are better than nothing. You cannot do away with them except by putting in their place something higher and nobler. But the ideal which we are to strive toward, and which the school should inculcate, and which the press should urge, is a government after the pattern of the divine government. It is time for us to be done working by the selfish and malign feelings. We have worked long enough by the basilar faculties. It is time for the pulpit, and the paper, and the school, as well as the household, to begin to work by the law, irrepressible, of love.

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

And how is that? Let me read again the passage with the context:

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for *He* maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We thank thee, O God! for thy pity. How helpless are we, striving against the mighty forces that are at work around about us, ignorant, inconstant, and often overborne! How often in our outward and bodily life do we need the suggestions of thy wisdom and the government of thy care and kindness! For all thy mercies through providence we thank thee. And we rejoice that thou knowest what things we have need of before we ask thee, and that thou art preparing and wilt prepare, even when thou doest it through ourselves, working in us to will and to do the things that are right. We rejoice that thou hast also the knowledge of that which is within, and that all our hearts' necessities are open before thee, and that thou dost not sit severely judging. We rejoice that, knowing what is right and what is wrong to us, thou art not sitting stern and ascerb and unrelenting, sharply demanding exact rectitude of all thy creatures. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. Thou dost behold what might, what power, in many is working the things that are for the flesh; and thou seest how they that strive against the flesh, often strive in discouragement and defeat, frequently cast down, though not destroyed. And thou dost have compassion upon their infirmities. Yea, and thou dost have compassion upon their sins. Thou dost not wait to be gracious until they have discharged their souls of all iniquity, faithful in word and life. Thou art beforehand with kindness, and with mercy, and with gentleness, and with goodness. And it is thy gentleness, it is thy sparing mercy, it is thy long-suffering kindness, it is thine infinite patience with us that saves us. And thou art ministering, in this strife within, to that which is good. Thou art teaching us to overcome that which is bad.

We thank thee that thou hast pity upon the struggles of our souls; and that all our dim discernings of things higher and better, which come to tantalize us and then to torment us; and that all the yearnings which we have, are the Spirit striving in us, and with us, with groanings that cannot be uttered.

And so, though we cannot see thee face to face, though we know only in part, and look out upon the brilliant obscure of the other life, thou art there, and art drawing us up toward thee. How little the drops that go up by the draught of the sun know that they shall shine in the rainbow, and glow in the cloud! So thou art drawing us upward, we know not where, except that it shall be to joy and purity and dignity and glory. We do not understand these things yet, nor their meanings; but we have faith to believe that thou art sitting in an eternal Fatherhood of love, and that thy heart is full of power, and that all wisdom comes forth from it. Thou art drawing all things kindly, gently, upward to the land of blessedness; and thou wilt overcome, as with an everlasting victory, all opposition; and thou wilt banish all things from heaven that make offense and destroy with transgression. Thou wilt utterly purify the universe. Yet the day shall come when thou wilt have all things put beneath thy power. And we rejoice, though the fullness of the meaning cannot be apprehended, that we understand enough to fill us with hope and cheer. We shall be there; we shall see thee; we shall be like thee; we shall understand even as now we are understood. All uncertainty will have passed away. We shall begin the better career, having left behind tormenting passions—the body and all its infirmities and ailments; and we shall be as the angels of God. In the hope of this blessed consummation we live, and will unto the end.

Now, draw near to every one in whom thou hast implanted these desires;

to every one that hungers and thirsts for righteousness, to teach them which is the Gate Beautiful. Teach them by it to enter the temple of God. And having entered, may they abide there. Teach thou thine own to come by the way of love, in which is all light, and all strength, and all hope, and all truth, and all rectitude, and all that is divine.

And we pray that thou wilt interpret thyself more and more to thy people in the royalty of thy real and innermost life. We pray for the coming of that kingdom in which love shall be supreme. Let thy will be done upon earth as it is in heaven. We pray for the day when more and more shall seek Christ, subduing their pride, their selfishness, and their waywardness, and becoming gentle, and long-suffering, and patient, and full of disinterested kindness, as thou art. We pray that thou wilt grant that those who are thine may grow not so much in the fervor and visions and raptures of an imaginative experience, as in the reality of self-distrust and self-denial, and of doing good, and of being good that they may do good.

And we pray that thou wilt increase the power of the church by increasing the power of the faith that works by love in all its members.

We pray that thou wilt spread abroad this Gospel of purity and of rectitude, by the power of divine love in their example. Grant that if there be any seeking to live a new and better life, they may not hesitate to lay aside their sins. May they have the inspiration and power which comes from the higher life in Christ Jesus. May they learn in him what is disinterested kindness and love. And may they seek this love with all their heart and mind and soul and strength, toward God and toward man. May it be the feeling of their nature.

And we pray that thou wilt grant patience to those that are discouraged, or those that seek under great difficulties to fulfill the law of God in themselves. Even if they suffer, may they still persevere, knowing that when they have suffered awhile God will rescue them, or that he will give them grace to bear, if he take not the thorn from their side.

We pray that thou wilt bless all thy erring children wherever they are. Grant that they may be conscious that the treasure that waits for them is greater than the treasure which they seek. How much better is the house above than the houses which we build below! How much better are the friendships that bloom in immortality than those whose seeds we plant in this chilly soil of life! How much better is the glorious companionship and noble society of the blessed in heaven than that which we seek among men! Grant that we may have imperishable riches. Grant that we may have friendships that never grow dim. Grant that we may have aspirations and ambitions that shall never die, but that shall have more realization beyond the grave than they can have here.

We pray, O Lord! that thou wilt grant that this day divine truth may be ministered in us by these holy thoughts and ardent yearnings. Grant that we may this day feel ourselves drawn up toward thee. How all things are looking up to-day toward the sun, for light and for warmth! How all the fields yearn! How all the sleeping tribes, that have lain long covered down by winter, begin to solicit, and are drawn unsolicited by the bright shining of the sun! For the Spring hath come, and warmth revives, and the singing of the birds is heard again. So, O Sun of righteousness! come to our winter. So come to all our dormant thoughts and feelings in us, that they shall spring up with new growth. Make our heart the garden of the Lord. Walk thou in it. And may we meet thee unabashed and unashamed.

We pray that this thy church, and all thy churches, may rejoice to-day. May thy servants be able to preach with heart, and with soul, and with hope of success. Wherever they are in the circumstances of discouragement, wherever they sow much and reap little, may they still have the con-

scious presence of God, and may their faith not fail, and may they have a longer life in view than that which lies between these horizons. May they live and labor as those that expect to see another and glorious life beyond, when resurrection shall have found them, and brought them into the presence of God. And so may they endure trials and burdens, not fainting by the way, and knowing that they will reap in due season if they faint not.

We pray for feeble churches, wherever they are, throughout the length and breadth of our land. May scattered flocks be gathered together and may shepherds be found to lead them by the side of still waters.

And may intelligence prevail. May schools, and colleges, and academies, and universities, and all seminaries of learning, sacred and divine, have thy presence and guidance, that the young that are passing through them, may be sanctified, and grow up to be godly men.

And we pray that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon the nations of the earth. We thank thee for coming peace. We pray that all the ravages of war may be repaired. We pray that those that sigh, and that are bereaved, and that sit in darkness, may find consolation and comforters. May the day come when justice shall prevail; when there shall be no war; when this mighty medicine of God shall no longer be given to the nations that are sick so that they must needs drink blood. We pray thee. O Lord! that the final glory may come—the new heaven and the new earth in which dwell righteousness. And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son, and Spirit, evermore. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Wilt thou follow with thy blessing, Almighty God, our heavenly Father, the word of truth and of exhortation which has been spoken. Fill our hearts with supreme beneficence. May it grow in us. And as from the ripening tree fall, even in the silence of the summer night, the fruits that are waiting for the comer, so from our unconscious thought and our unconscious feeling, may there drop down perpetually blossom and fruit of all goodness and love. Grant, we pray thee, that we may seek more and more the mind and will that are in Christ. And, may that Spirit which is in the Father, and which brought him from the throne to the bottom of human life, and which led him to love the unlovely, and to die for his enemies, and to return to his glory above, and live for the good of men—grant that it may be in us. And may we remember that if a man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his. And finally may we be brought where we shall need no more exhortation, and shall be like thee, and shall shine in the luminousness of an endless life. And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son, and Spirit. *Amen.*

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

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